DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 051 714 FL 002 314

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TITLE Recommendations on the Foreign Language Requirement in the College of Arts and Sciences.
INSTITUTION Massachusetts Univ., Amherst.
PUB DATE 25 Feb 69
NOTE 8p.; Report of the Committee on Foreign Language Instruction, College of Arts and Sciences

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Advisory Committees, *College Admission, College Faculty, College Language Programs, *Colleges, Core Courses, Cultural Education, *Degree Requirements, *Educational Trends, Enrollment Trends, Instructional Program Divisions, Language Arts, Language Instruction, *Modern Languages, Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Asserting that the importance of language arts in the contemporary world is a liberating and humanistic educational experience, a plea is made for establishing a fresh approach to the foreign language requirement in two semesters or less by providing the student with a series of options, by maintaining the universal requirement administered by the college itself, and by having the individual departments formulate more stringent recommendations for their own students. Corollary recommendations covered in the report include: (1) increasing the entrance requirement from two to three years providing there is substantial improvement in the quality of secondary school instruction, (2) expanding the counseling services to explain to the freshmen the full nature and rationale of the requirement, and (3) combining the rhetoric and the foreign language requirements, calling it the Language Arts Requirement. (DS)

ED051714

College of Arts and Sciences, University of Massachusetts
Amherst,

MEMORANDUM

From: The Committee on Foreign Language Instruction February 25, 1969

To: Deans I. Moyer Hunsberger and John M. Maki

Subject: Recommendations on the Foreign Language Requirement in the College of Arts and Sciences

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I. INTRODUCTION

In its deliberations since the beginning of the present academic year the Committee on Foreign Language Instruction has taken a fresh look at the concept of a foreign language requirement and at the position accorded foreign language study in the curriculum of the College of Arts and Sciences. Our basic premise is an assertion of the fundamental importance of the language arts in any contemporary and meaningful conception of education. By language arts we mean the ability of a human being to express himself or to communicate effectively.

The basic language arts for which educational systems are responsible involve a mastery of the student's mother tongue. Thus, in American colleges and universities English composition, speech, and rhetoric requirements have long been established and continue to serve valid ends for all students. However, in a modern world characterized by diversity, technological complexity, and disappearing geographical barriers, there are many other modes of communication and human expression, and effective and meaningful communication across language barriers is coming to be one of mankind's greatest problems. Educational institutions accordingly have a special responsibility to introduce all students to at least one of the modes of communication other than their mother tongues. Education and monolingualism are incompatible.

In addition to providing all students with skills in the use of at least one appropriate alternate language, educational institutions have a further responsibility in the area of language and communication arts: they must provide a meaningful and contemporary understanding of some of the complex and subtle technological, theoretical, psychological, and philosophical aspects of the general problem of human communication. In this context one can investigate a wide variety of modes of expression or communication such as audio, visual, and printed mass media, the visual arts, creative writing, conceptual mathematics, formal logic, and computer languages.

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The proper subject of this paper, however, is the role of language arts when more strictly defined: in particular, the study of foreign languages in the liberal arts curriculum. We are concerned not only with foreign languages as tools of communication to be used by the student in travel abroad, reading, listening to the radio, or viewing foreign films. We are also concerned, and deeply so, with foreign language learning as in itself essentially a liberating and humanistic educational experience. This experience at its best can provide a unique kind of enlightenment, and in two directions. It can provide a means of crossing linguistic, national, and cultural barriers and of approaching an understanding of foreign countries, civilizations, and cultures. And, by opening new perspectives it can cause the student to reflect back upon himself, his language, and his culture. As the student learns a foreign mode of human expression he will simultaneously be learning something about himself and about humankind in general. It is in this way that the study of foreign languages makes its essential contribution to what has traditionally been called a humanistic educational experience.

It is in the context of these broad considerations of the importance of the language arts in a contemporary humanistic curriculum that we wish to formulate a new approach to the study of foreign languages and to the foreign language requirement in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Massachusetts.

II. LANGUAGE ARTS

All students entering the University have already had continued experience with language arts, yet they may have only a fragile awareness of the place of such arts in their total educational experience. The chances are good that the average student will have seen the language arts not as a whole or encompassing learning experience but rather as a series of specific segments of study the relationship of which may not be immediately clear. His most conscious and direct efforts in language will have been made in both English and foreign language classes, the latter being a new dimension of language study added at some point in the elementary or secondary school years. Under the title of English the matriculating student will

have had varying amounts of grammar, word study, oral and written composition, and literature. His study of a foreign language will have exposed him to a different system of sounds, structure, and meaning. He may even have come to appreciate how a foreign language gives him a completely different framework of communication, yet a framework interestingly comparable to his own mother tongue.

When the student arrives at the University, he will be expected to develop these beginning language skills. He will enter the new courses being designed by the Rhetoric Committee, where he will continue his study of the English language and continue to improve his skills in its use. The Foreign Language Committee wishes to suggest the following series of courses from which this same student should choose in order to continue his study of a second language or to add a third language.

1. The present four course foreign language sequence. Placement within the sequence will be determined by the score achieved on a placement test, and full credit will be granted regardless of previous language study in secondary school. The student may, if he wishes, enter the sequence one level lower than the one determined by the test. In such cases the student will receive credit but be graded on a pass-fail basis.

   It should be noted that if the entrance requirement is raised from two to three years of one foreign language, as recommended in part IV, A of this report, the great majority of students will place on entrance in 130 or 140, and increased numbers will be exempted altogether from further foreign language study. This four course sequence will aim at achieving proficiency of a certain pre-determined level in all four language skills (reading, writing, listening comprehension, speaking). It should be noted that tracks for majors, non-majors, honors students, and those in need of remedial work have been established in some languages on the 130-140 level.

2. Divisional reading options on the 130-140 level of the four course foreign language sequence. Placement will be the same as above. These courses will not aim at proficiency in the four skills but will instead concentrate on reading. The student may choose among three options or tracks according to his own interests and intended major. One track will be involved with readings in important original material in the foreign language relating to the humanities (literature, history, art, music, philosophy). A second track will read original foreign language material in the social sciences, and a third in the physical sciences. On the 130 level simple material of a popularized nature will be read, with an emphasis on development of reading skills. This will prepare for progressively more difficult material on the 140 level. These courses will be designed in cooperation with representatives from other departments.

to assure that the material read will be directly relevant to the needs of students in those departments. It is suggested that the appropriate track of this course be strongly recommended for majors in departments in the respective divisions and for possible divisional majors. Possibly some form of credit toward a major could be gained by taking the appropriate track in this sequence of foreign language courses. This would be a large step toward integrating the study of foreign languages with the major area of the student's education.

3. An intensive two semester language sequence. This would be an intensive course meeting eight to ten hours per week and receiving double credit (=12 hours for the two semester sequence). This sequence is primarily intended for students wishing to begin a new foreign language, but specially qualified students could enter in the middle of the sequence. Placement procedures would be the same as above. The course would be designed to lead to the same level of proficiency in all four skills as would be achieved in the normal four course foreign language sequence (1 above).

4. A semi-intensive two semester foreign language reading course. The first semester would be an intensive course meeting eight to ten hours per week and receiving 6 credits. It would concentrate on the learning of vocabulary, syntax, and representative structural patterns, accompanied by practice in pronunciation. Graded readings would be introduced as soon as possible, and by the end of the first semester by concentrating on reading skills alone the students would have achieved a level of proficiency that would allow them to continue in the second semester with the divisional reading option on the 130 or 140 level described in number 2 above. Placement at the one level or the other will depend on the recommendation of the instructor. This course would meet three times a week and receive three credits, and consequently this sequence as a whole is described as semi-intensive: double meetings and double credit first semester followed by regular meetings and regular credit second semester. This sequence is also primarily intended for students wishing to begin a new foreign language. Those with some previous experience of the given language would be admitted to the first semester of the sequence for full credit only if their placement test score indicated a 110 or 120 level. If it indicated a 130 level, credit would be granted only on a pass-fail basis.

We wish also to recommend that the Linguistics Program explore the possibility of establishing appropriate courses dealing with language that might serve as additional options.

It is proposed that these options be introduced without delay in whatever foreign language programs consider them practicable and have the necessary staff. We wish to invite all faculty members to suggest any other forms of foreign language instruction which might be of service to students on this campus.

In order to increase the foreign language options available to students in the College, we strongly support efforts presently being made to

expand the offerings in Oriental languages. At the same time we recommend the initiation of courses in one or more African languages, especially in the light of a new interest on this campus in Afro-American studies.

III. THE REQUIREMENT

In formulating the terms of an appropriate and viable foreign language requirement, the Committee has been guided by three considerations. First, in keeping with a general reduction of requirements in the curriculum of the College, the Committee wishes to make it possible for any student to fulfill his foreign language requirement in two semesters or less. Second, in harmony with the trend toward providing a series of alternatives rather than specific courses as requirements, the Committee wishes to provide the student with a series of options broad enough to assure that the educational experience involved in fulfilling the requirement may be relevant for every student. Third, in order to maintain the respectability and integrity of the degree of Bachelor of Arts granted to students completing the curriculum in the College of Arts and Sciences, we have decided unanimously in favor of retaining a college-wide or universal requirement administered by the College itself. We feel strongly that the abolition of such a requirement would be detrimental to the very existence of our College as an institution of liberal education and would lead the way to excessively departmentalized pre-professional specialization. We submit that if any requirements are to be retained in the College the foreign language requirement which we are proposing here is just as valid and viable as the rhetoric requirement, the literature requirement, the history-philosophy requirement, or the social and natural science requirements.

The foreign language requirement as we have designed it could be fulfilled in any of the following ways:

1. By attaining an approved score on the College Entrance Examination Board foreign language test taken in the senior year of high school. The approved score would be equivalent to the average score attained by students at the University of Massachusetts on a similar test taken on completion of the 140 level course in the foreign language. Students attaining exemption by this means will be awarded 6 advanced placement credits.

2. By attaining a similar score on a University administered placement or proficiency test. Depending on the language involved, this would be either a standardized or a departmentally devised test. It could

be taken during summer counseling prior to the student's arrival on campus for his freshman year, or it could be taken at officially designated times in the course of the school year. Students attaining exemption by this means will also be awarded 6 advanced placement credits.

3. By completing one of the sequences of foreign language study outlined in the above list on pages 3 or 4. Students admitted by placement test on the 140 level will receive 3 advanced placement credits if they complete the sequence with a grade of C or better. The options available to the student in the various tracks provided by these sequences will assure that the material studied will be relevant to all divisions and most departments.

These alternatives, we submit, provide flexibility, relevance, and a real choice among options, while at the same time assuring that students graduating from the College of Arts and Sciences will have had some substantial experience with foreign language arts.

At the same time we wish to suggest that individual departments might formulate more stringent recommendations or requirements for their own students and that they might grant some form of credit toward fulfillment of requirements for the major to students who continue work in foreign languages beyond the minimal College requirement. Students majoring in the humanities might be urged or required to take a semester or a year course in a foreign literature above the 140 level. Those majoring in certain areas of the humanities might be urged or required to take Latin in addition to a modern foreign language. Students in some areas of science and mathematics might be urged or required to attain a reading knowledge of two or even three modern foreign languages. The divisional reading options described on pages 3 and 4 will assure that acquisition of such a reading knowledge may be attained as efficiently as possible and that the efforts expended will be directly relevant to the student's research interests. The Committee on Foreign Language Instruction welcomes any suggestions for making the teaching of foreign languages on this campus more meaningful and useful for students in the various departments of the College.

IV. COROLLARY RECOMMENDATIONS

A. The Entrance Requirement

This Committee is vitally concerned with the extent, the nature, and the quality of foreign language instruction in the Commonwealth's secondary

schools. Another committee within the language departments has been working at the complex task of improving instruction on the secondary level and has to date made some progress which is soon to affect teacher training at the University. The present Committee expects to become fully involved in these efforts to upgrade the teaching of foreign languages.

The Committee wishes now to recommend a policy limited to a specific period of time which it believes will create a long term effect in helping the high schools turn out students who are already proficient in a given foreign language, or nearly so, when they apply for admission to the University. The Committee recommends that the entrance requirement for the College of Arts and Sciences be raised from two to three years of one foreign language. It is suggested that this requirement become effective four years after adoption for a five year period. In the nine year span indicated by this proposal the high schools of the Commonwealth will have had sufficient time to raise the level and improve the quality of their foreign language instruction. Another result of this recommendation is that the University would gradually reduce the number of skills courses in foreign languages as the proficiency of its entering freshmen increases. Finally, there would be a substantial increase in the number of students exempted by College Boards or placement test from further required study of foreign languages at the University.

B. Counseling

The Committee further recommends that increased efforts be made by the College and by the departments to acquaint entering freshmen with the nature and the rationale of the requirements that they will be expected to fulfill. We believe that it is the responsibility of the College to assure that each student understands the purpose of the requirements it has adopted. The students should be made more aware than they have been in the past of how the requirements are designed to shape their educational experience, and, equally importantly, of how the new options which the students are being offered help them shape their own educational experience in the light of their own individual interests and objectives. Increased counseling and guidance services are needed to help the student make an intelligent choice among the options presented to him. It is to be hoped that by thus being allowed a more active hand in planning their own education the students will be better motivated and more directly engaged in the particular learning

experience they will choose for themselves.

C. Conclusion: A Foreign Language-Rhetoric Requirement

These recommendations of the Foreign Language Committee were premised on the assertion of the fundamental importance of the language arts in modern education. We have noted at several points a close relationship between our own concerns and those of the Rhetoric Committee, and we have been viewing the shared concerns of our two committees in the encompassing perspective of language arts. We have re-formulated the foreign language requirement in terms broader than ever before so as to make it as significant as possible for all the divisions and departments and students in the College. In order to bring about a rapprochement that would be in keeping with the essential philosophic perspective on which these recommendations have been based, the Foreign Language Committee wishes to suggest the possibility of combining the rhetoric and foreign into a single one that would be fulfilled by completing the requirements proposed by our respective committees. An appropriate name for the combined requirement would be a matter for discussion between the two committees. At the moment we would merely suggest the phrase Language Arts Requirement. Such a combined requirement would make the students more aware of the essential unity underlying these two areas of study, thus leading them to appreciate more fully the linguistic basis of the humanities.

Respectfully submitted by the Committee on Foreign Language Instruction:

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